

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Goodness, *Galatians 5:22-23*

Amy bought me a t-shirt that has the phrase "do good" printed on the front. I love that shirt (I love it so much I bought a second one in a different color). The 'slogan' is a positive version of the often mocked "Don't be evil" motto that Google adopted in the early 2000s. Both phrases – 'do good, "don't be evil" – acknowledge the importance of moral behavior. Problems, however, arise when one tries to define "goodness" because it has a flexible meaning determined by the ever-evolving tastes of our society.

The Bible similarly emphasizes the importance of goodness. Paul, for example, wrote that Christians should "learn to devote themselves to good works"¹ (*Titus 3:14*). Unlike our culture, the Bible offers a fixed understanding of goodness based on the identity and behavior of God. We will consider the goodness in this lesson as part of our ongoing exploration of the "fruit of the Spirit" Paul lists in Galatians 5:22-23.

"No one is good except God alone"²

- The Bible inseparably ties "good" and "goodness" to God. For example:
 - Psalm 136:1 – God "is good".
 - Exodus 33:19-20 – God described His presence as "goodness".
 - Psalm 119:68 – because God is good, He does good.
 - James 1:17 – every good thing in life comes from God.
- The goodness the Bible connects to God expresses itself in two principal ways:
 - The "very good" creation (*Genesis 1-2*) that God gave to humanity as an abundant, generous, life-giving resource.
 - The unmerited rescue and redemption He "lavishes" on people (*cf. Deuteronomy 7:7-8; Ephesians 1:7-8*).
- The generosity that characterizes God's goodness prepares us for Jesus' parable of the laborers in the vineyard in which he describes the master's goodness as "generosity", using the same Greek word Paul uses in Galatians 5:22 for "goodness" (*Matthew 20:1-15*).
- In contrast to God's generous goodness, Genesis reveals that Adam and Eve did not know "good" and chose to selfishly take knowledge of it for themselves rather than humbly learning it from God (*Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7*).
- Jesus intensified the contrast between God's goodness and humanity's lack of goodness when he said that "no one is good except God alone" (*Mark 10:18*).

¹ All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.

² Mark 10:18.



- While no person possesses the intrinsic goodness that characterizes God, Paul wrote that God creates new people through Jesus "for good works" (*Ephesians 2:10*; cf. *Romans 12:9*; *2 Corinthians 9:8*; *Galatians 6:9-10*; *Colossians 1:10*; *2 Thessalonians 3:13*).
- The good works God created Christians to perform focus on imitating His goodness (cf. *3 John 11*).
- Because the "whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" in Jesus (*Colossians 2:9*), his lifestyle of going "about doing good" offers a template for the good works God expects Christians to imitate (*Acts 10:38*). Christians should:
 - Follow the example of Jesus' humility by considering others more important than themselves (*Matthew 20:20-28*; *Philippians 2:1-8*).
 - Serve others' needs with the selfless love that characterized Jesus (*John 13:3-17, 34-35*).
 - Practice generosity in their relationships that mirrors Jesus' generosity (*Philippians 2:8*; cf. *1 Timothy 6:17-19*).
- The connection between generosity and "goodness" helps us differentiate between the "kindness" and "goodness" Paul placed next to each other in *Galatians 5:22-23*.
 - "Kindness" describes the affection that motivates one to treat all people with honor and dignity (cf. *Matthew 7:12*).
 - "Goodness" refers to the generous application of kindness; it describes going beyond what might be 'required' in one's relationship with other people (cf. *Matthew 20:1-15*; *Luke 10:25-37*).
 - The generosity of goodness that goes beyond what is required helps us understand Paul's comment that "perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die" (*Romans 5:7*).

Applications

- God calls Christians to a lifestyle defined by "good works" (*Ephesians 2:10*). He does not call us to a life marked by 'random acts of kindness' but a life committed to intentionally doing good at all times.
- The generosity associated with goodness builds on a very different perspective on life – it sees the world as a place of abundance based on God's generous sovereignty rather than a limited resource that must be hoarded (cf. *2 Corinthians 9:6-9*).
- Good people do not necessarily focus on what is 'fair' but chose to instead err on the side of generosity and kindness.

God is good and asks us to imitate His goodness in our relationships with one another. We should, therefore, ask ourselves, "Do others believe me to be a good person whose life reflects God's character?"



CREATED FOR GOOD WORKS

Kindness, *Galatians 5:22-23*

Paul wrote that the Holy Spirit seeks to cultivate "goodness" in us (*Galatians 5:22*). He also noted that Christians are God's "workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works" (*Ephesians 2:10*). Therefore, we will consider the "good works" Paul describes in his letter to the Ephesians to help us better understand the goodness the Holy Spirit seeks to create within us.

Paul wrote that God forms Christians into a new humanity through Jesus (*Ephesians 2:14-15*). As a new humanity, Christians become a down payment on the "new heavens and a new earth" the Bible envisions God using to replace the sin-corrupted world we inhabit (*Isaiah 65:17; 66:18-24; 2 Peter 3:11-13; Revelation 21:1*). The transformation God effects in Christians bridges the reality of our current sin-filled world and the hope of a future in which "the former things have passed away" (*Revelation 21:3-4*). Christians' changed lives direct attention to God by evidencing the truth of His plan and its wisdom (*Ephesians 3:1-12*).

To fulfill that role, Paul wrote that God "created [Christians] in Christ Jesus for good works" through which they demonstrate their identity and evidence His plan (*Ephesians 2:10*). Those works form a "walk" (*Ephesians 4:1; 5:1-2, 15*), a lifestyle that defines their behavior in the world. Notice the things Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, connected to that lifestyle:

- Protecting the unity God creates among Christians by embracing humility, gentleness, patience, and tolerant love (*Ephesians 4:1-3*).
- Practicing the selfless, sacrificial love that characterized Jesus (*Ephesians 5:1-2*).
- Practicing submission in all our relationships (*Ephesians 5:15-6:10*).

What focus(es) characterizes the "good works" Paul wrote Christians should perform? How might those "good works" help us understand "goodness"?

What motivates the goodness that Paul describes (*cf. Ephesians 5:21, 22, 25; 6:1, 4, 5*)? How do you think a focus on Jesus ought to shape our goodness?

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The early church's response to the needs of its members illustrates the "good works" Christians should perform (*Acts 2:42-45*). How does their behavior mirror God's generous goodness? How might scarcity/abundance thinking influence our willingness to follow their example (*scarcity thinking* – goods are a limited resource that must be preserved and protected; *abundance thinking* – goods are an unlimited resource and should be shared)?

How do you think we can differentiate our goodness in our society that tends to praise good works like charity, public service, and humility?

What things do you think keep us from doing "good works"? What practical things do you think we can do to overcome those obstacles and cultivate our goodness?

In what ways have you experienced God's goodness in your life? How might your experiences of God's goodness guide you in how you should practice goodness?

